



*Los Angeles*

***I am Black***

***I am White***

***I am L.A.***

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→ 20 YEARS AFTER THE RIOTS,  
THE CITY HAS A DIFFERENT COMPLEXION.  
SO WHAT DOES RACE MEAN ANYMORE?  
EVERYTHING.

A SPECIAL ISSUE // PAGE 120



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***I am Asian***

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BRIANN,  
HIGHLAND  
PARK

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20 YEARS AFTER

# Race in L.A.



**ABOUT THIS IMAGE**  
Dustin Snipes stood for seven hours over the course of two days at 6th and Hill streets downtown photographing passersby. It is composed of 24 images.

OURS IS A CITY OF **MANY VOICES AND CULTURES**, OF DISPARATE YEARS AGO THIS MONTH, THOSE **FAULT LINES RUPTURED**. WHAT HAPPENED ON **APRIL 29, 1992**, CHANGED LOS ANGELES TO FAMOUSLY ASK, "**CAN WE ALL GET ALONG?**" WE STILL

BACKGROUNDS AND CONFLICTING INTERESTS. TWENTY WHETHER YOU CALL IT **AN UPRISING, A RIOT**, OR CIVIL UNREST, AND THE PEOPLE IN IT, PROMPTING RODNEY KING WANT THE ANSWER TO BE YES. BUT **IT'S COMPLICATED**.  
( TO FIND OUT WHY, TURN THE PAGE. )



# CROSSOVERS

## FINDING HARMONY AT ROBIN HART AND DEJ SRIAMPAI'S VALLEY GYM

Three years ago personal trainer Robin Hart, who is white, and her husband, Dej "Nokweed" Sriampai, who is from Thailand, opened At One Fitness in a North Hollywood warehouse with the hope of bringing righteousness to the gym. "We wanted to create a place where people could build not only their bodies but their character," says Hart. Students who are white, black, Latino, and Asian come here for muay thai-style kickboxing. Raised by monks, Sriampai is an instructor and ring official whose calm demeanor serves as the best advertisement for the martial art. "Our motto is, if your body is strong, then your brain is sharp and you make better decisions," he says. "We teach how to be humble and peaceful." And to say thank-you because, as Sriampai notes, "in martial arts you are no good without your partner." Hart nods in agreement. "You need each other to develop yourself." > A.W.



ON THE STREET  
The author in 1992 on West Adams, where his pickup had been torched

TURNABOUT

## Angry Young Man

THE RIOTS NEEDED THEIR NARRATORS, AND THIS BILINGUAL SON OF IMMIGRANTS EMBRACED THE ROLE. UNTIL HE DIDN'T BY RUBÉN MARTÍNEZ

ON APRIL 29, 1992, I was 29 years old and a reporter at the *L.A. Weekly*. I had a modest following among the city's progressives, particularly those sympathetic to immigrants' rights. Forty-eight hours later I was riding limousines to TV studios, had a worldwide audience and, soon enough, invitations to lecture. Voices on the phone had all kinds of propositions for work. I became a bona fide spokesperson for "my people," who had, to the shock of many, been central protagonists of the violence. (In an oft-cited riot statistic, ultimately more Latinos were arrested than African Americans.)

I was perfectly positioned for the role. I was bilingual, the son and grandson of immigrants. I also had, I'm now thoroughly embarrassed to admit, the right look of the moment. Borrowing from the Gipsy Kings and various incarnations of Latin pop, I wore a goatee, my hair in a ponytail, red shirts, and flamboyant ties. Sleepless-

ly bounding from KCET's studios, where I had just started cohosting a local politics and culture series called *Life & Times*, to barrios in flames to my desk at the *Weekly* to emergency activist meetings, I didn't have much time to reflect on that positioning, though in retrospect the angry young man I embodied was fueled in great part by the tension inherent in the role. The promise of the civil rights movement had been to arrive at a place where we were no longer judged by the color of our skin, but the "white" media needed me to be brown.

Which I was. And of course I was so much more. I was middle class and a generation removed from Latin American poverty. My paternal grandparents had sung opera, my Salvadoran mother was a psychologist and a poet, I loved rock and roll and baseball. But during the riots, there was real blood on the streets and desperation in the immigrant neighborhoods, and people were looking for a kind of authenticity they thought I could provide. I represented, as they say, but not without feeling as though I'd entered into something of a devil's bargain.

I made money (CONTINUED ON PAGE 165)

THIS PAGE: NANCY NUSTON; OPPOSITE: DREW HINO; STYLING: WHEELER/NOIRGROUP

## 20 YEARS AFTER THE POLITICIAN



L.A. County Supervisor

## Mark Ridley-Thomas

FLORENCE AND NORMANDIE sat in my district, the 8th. Once the verdicts came in, I went to First A.M.E. Church to speak truthfully and calmly about the position in which we found ourselves. Yet by the evening of April 29, all that thinking went out the window. That first night in the church we learned that the gas station across the street was aflame. This was frightening. I was awake for approximately 36 hours, and it was all a blur. I had to get home to make sure our four-year-old twin boys were safe, and then I found my way to my district office, at Manchester and Vermont. The intersection would be the second hardest hit of all locations over the weekend. We had a brand-new constituent services center there, the first achievement I had as a new city council member. That business core—all 22 structures—was completely destroyed. It seemed clear to me that Los Angeles was broken. Yet we turned more around, more quickly, than might have been imagined. The unrest set in motion the Christopher Commission and oversight of the LAPD. And if you compare 1992 to 1965—to Watts—the response in '92 was far more economic-development oriented. We built back businesses; we cleaned up the environment.

Photograph by KWAKE ALSTON

Photograph by TED SOQUI